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A NEW DEMAND UPON PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS FOR TEACHERS

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1. It is a common experience for principals and teachers in elementary schools to be called upon by pupils and their parents for advice concerning the prospective careers of pupils. Whether or no a pupil shall continue in school or enter at once upon an apprenticeship in a trade or in a commercial pursuit; whether he shall plan to enter a high school and, if so, in what course; whether it would be advisable for the pupil to prepare for a professional career and, if so, for what profession—these are practical problems such as parents and their children are constantly facing. Recognizing their own inability to work out satisfactory solutions to such problems, many pupils, with or without the knowledge and support of their parents, turn with significant confidence to teacher or principal or superintendent for counsel or guidance.

Though teachers and school officers are not altogether loath to tender their good offices in such cases, it may be seriously doubted whether the advice given often has value other than advice of friendly interest. Excepting the cases where strong native tendencies in children leave little or no doubt as to the vocations for which they are fitted, there is apparently little basis upon which either parents or teachers may make reliable forecasts as to the probable success or failure of a given child in specific vocations. The individuals having native abilities most strongly marked are, of course, least in need of specific guidance in the choice of vocations. It is the great majority without well-defined or clearly recognizable tendencies who must have such guidance if we are to substitute for the present practice of purely fortuitous choice of vocations a more rational practice based upon the adaptation of the individual to his work.

The results of the present random selection of vocations are widespread and evident. Commercial failures, incompetent mechanics, disgruntled professional men, unsympathetic and mechanical teachers, prosaic poets, uninspired preachers, briefless lawyers, honest politicians, and dishonest bank clerks—these and similar evidences point to a deplorable maladjustment.

2. The present organization of elementary education is not designed, even in its later years, to make children aware of their special abilities. The elementary-school course is based upon two radically erroneous assumptions; the first, that the great majority of the pupils in the schools will finish the elementary grades; the second, that the needs of the pupils in the elementary grades are identical as to the so-called “fundamental” education extending through eight years of the school course.

Accurate data as to the dropping out of pupils in the elementary grades are not available, but it is a matter of common knowledge among teachers that pupils drop out with increasing frequency after the fifth school year. This tendency is commonly attributed to economic causes; and without doubt the desire of many parents to have their children begin to earn a livelihood does account for the dropping out of many children. If the facts were known, however, it could probably be shown that economic pressure is not one of the strongest influences in producing this tendency. There is undoubtedly, among parents and pupils, a widespread feeling, not without reasonable basis, that the latter years of the elementary-school course are not highly essential to the welfare of the children and that there is a greater economic advantage in several years of apprenticeship than a like number of years in the upper grades of the elementary schools.

An indication of the truth of this statement may be found in the fact that the organization of technical and commercial courses in high schools commonly has the effect of increasing registration and of raising the percentage of pupils continuing to the end of the outlined course in such schools. The influences that determine the dropping out of pupils in high schools are probably not very different from those operative in elementary schools.

The deliberate choice of a considerable proportion of the

pupils in elementary grades to leave school and enter upon some vocational pursuit, even when economic pressure is not unduly strong and parents advise against the discontinuance of school work, is evidence of a distinct psychological need that arises in the early period of adolescence. The indication is clear that pupils at this stage of their development require greater differentiation and specialization of training than the elementary school is providing. There is actual call for something that leads to a definite outcome in terms of the world's work, especially in terms of that part of it for which the powers and prospects of the individual pupil specially qualify him. There is an impulse, almost an instinct, among many pupils, to try their powers on "real" things; on things that mean much and count much in human affairs.

It is this impulse that gives much of the force possessed by the "manual-training movement." Even the manual training as commonly organized, however, fails to meet adequately the psychological demand for work that bears directly upon the problems of individual and social life. The subject is still too far away from the real social world in which vocations play so commanding a part. Manual training does not "help" in a way sufficiently direct and definite to meet the demands under consideration.

Not only are teachers and administrative officers unable, then, to give pupils trustworthy guidance in the matter of a choice of vocation, but the school is ill adapted, in its last few years, to the peculiar psychological needs of children whose powers are clearly differentiating and whose interests are potentially or actually of a strongly practical nature. There is an obvious call here for the reorganization of the last few years of elementary education in such a way as to provide more effectively for the needs of the various groups of children differing in native capacity, in social and industrial surroundings, in power of self-support, and, consequently, in prospective career.

The familiar objections to early specialization will readily come to mind in this connection. These objections were employed in the long since abandoned fight against the system of

election in college courses. They are still retained as stock arguments by the conservatives and reactionists in the field of secondary education. They will no doubt be similarly used by the opponents of optional courses in elementary education. The problem is really identical throughout the whole range of educational organization, and the final solution must inevitably conform to the fundamental facts involved. Briefly stated the question is: how may we provide for the most effective development of the capacities of a group of individuals who differ widely in moral and intellectual inheritance in cultural surroundings, in acquired taste and powers, in economic status, and in prospective career; are the interests of individuals and of society, under these conditions, best subserved by a single, undifferentiated, prescribed programme of studies or by a flexible system of optional courses designed to meet the specific needs of the different classes of individuals in the group?

If a completely social basis for education be accepted, it is difficult to see how this question can be answered other than in one way. The facts of genetic psychology and the facts of normal social life alike demand that adequate provision be made for special training whenever special aptitudes and special tastes come to be strongly enough marked to serve as the basis for separating individuals into distinct groups.

There is a prevailing notion that, in a democracy such as ours, equal educational opportunities must be offered to all children alike. This principle is indeed somewhat generally regarded as a fundamental corollary of democracy itself. When, however, we interpret "equal" educational opportunities to mean the "same" education for all, we are pushing the principle to an unwarrantable extreme. What to one child or group may be an educational opportunity of highest value, to another child or group may be no opportunity at all. It is not what is offered but what can be utilized in the way of education that is to be accounted genuine opportunity. "Completely rounded manhood," "a fundamental common-school education for all children," and similar statements of the aim of elementary education are superficially attractive to an uncritical audience; but they must be

relegated to the educational lumber-room along with a good many other worn-out traditions.

Our conventional distinction between elementary and secondary education is, in fact, without completely rational meaning. The practical distinction in organization may easily be explained historically, but it has little if any direct relation to existing social relations. It is difficult to find any tenable reason for an eight-year "elementary" course, planned for all children, to be followed by a four-year "secondary" course planned for all children who survive the so-called elementary course, and designed primarily to meet the requirements for admission to college. A rational distinction between elementary and secondary education would appear to be that secondary courses of instruction should be provided when children reach the secondary stage of development; that is, a stage of fairly distinct differentiation of interests and capacities. The elementary education, from this point of view, should be distinctly fundamental and social in character and should extend through the period when children are relatively unspecialized in their development. The facts previously discussed in this paper indicate that the point of division between elementary and secondary education belongs much earlier in the school course than it is now placed.

3. The mere organization of special courses and special schools designed to meet the specific needs of various groups of children will not, however, be of itself sufficient to assure us of a properly effective and democratic system of education. We must go farther and find a way to bring boys and girls to a definite consciousness of their specific abilities and thus make it possible for them to make rational choice among the courses open to them and, ultimately, of their respective vocations. Merely capricious choice of a course of instruction would certainly be as likely to result disastrously as capricious choice of a vocation. The undesirable results of capricious choice in both directions are to be avoided, if at all, by giving careful consideration to the influence of mental and moral traits upon success in various specific undertakings.

It is by no means certain, to be sure, that all of the persons at

present accounted unsuccessful in given vocations could have been assured of success in other vocations by even the most accurate determination in advance of their mental and moral traits. It must be evident, however, that under given environmental conditions these traits are the sole influences in determining success. Conversely, if an individual's mental and moral makeup be known we should be able to forecast his success in a given activity and thus furnish him with reliable guidance, provided we have also sufficient knowledge of the qualities required for success in given directions.

It may be suggested that the elements entering into individual character and the factors determining success in various careers present complications that make it impossible to find reliable solutions for such problems as those under consideration. But while it must be admitted that the difficulties are great, it may be confidently denied that they are insurmountable.

The application of modern statistical method to the measurement of mental traits has already demonstrated the possibility of a knowledge of mental and social life, both of individuals and of groups, far more extensive and thoroughgoing than any yet attained on a large scale. Recent investigations concerning the influence of heredity, notably that of Dr. F. A. Woods, on *Mental and Moral Heredity in Royalty*, have made clear the preponderating influence of inheritance in determining the mental and moral attainments of individuals. The direction for safe advance seems quite clearly marked. What good reason can there be for ignoring the plain facts of biology and of psychology; for assuming that children are really as clay in the potter's hands; and for leaving to chance and the vagaries of unenlightened impulse the important function of selecting, for the mass of our boys and girls, the activity to which each will devote the main part of his life?

4. A reasonable procedure would appear to call for: first, a system of psychological tests calculated to determine the chief mental and moral traits of each pupil; second, precise study of the co-relations between specific traits in individuals and success in typical vocations; third, the accumulation of properly recorded

data which, in subsequent generations, may serve as the basis for determining the probable tendencies due to inheritance.

If such a plan be sound, and if it is to be generally accepted, schools for the professional training of teachers must take an active part in developing its possibilities. Teachers must be equipped to recognize, to search for, and to interpret the evidences of special aptitude in pupils. In order that teachers and school officers may be thus equipped, it is necessary that the influence of heredity upon mental and moral traits be frankly recognized, and that we find a conception of genetic psychology more vital and practical than any yet widely prevalent.

It should hardly be necessary to present arguments in support of this assumption that professional schools should take a leading part in educational research and educational experimentation. It is a curious historical paradox that the study of the educational process, in many the crowning interest of mankind, should so signally have failed to profit by the example furnished in the unparalleled success attained elsewhere by the method of science. If teaching is to be in fact as well as in name a genuine profession, the spirit of investigation, of the pursuit of new truth, should pervade every school for the training of teachers.

Nor should it be necessary to answer the oft-repeated objection that "experimenting with children" is a reprehensible practice, incompatible with the best interests of the children. Every intelligent teacher is an experimenter, in the sense that he is constantly seeking to find better means and better matter to carry out the aims of education. The person trained in the method of scientific research simply has an advantage over a person not so trained, in the directness and facility with which he is able to carry on his experiments. As Professor Dewey has aptly said, "The experimentation is *for* the children, not *with* the children." The perennial freshness of interest, the attitude of inquiry, and the open-mindedness that must inevitably characterize the professional work of a person trained to habits of scientific inquiry, are in themselves a sufficient reason for placing marked emphasis upon methods of research in all institutions for the professional training of teachers. The solution of the main problem proposed

in this discussion, therefore, constitutes a new and urgent demand upon schools for the professional training of teachers.

SUMMARY

1. School officers and teachers, though often called upon by parents and pupils for advice concerning the prospective careers of pupils, in general are as helpless as the parents themselves to give advice that may be relied upon.

2. The school as organized is not able to bring boys and girls to definite consciousness of their specific abilities such as might enable them to adjust themselves rationally rather than fortuitously to the requirements of social life. This fact is partly accountable for the relatively unsuccessful careers of the great mass of our population.

3. With proper data concerning the inheritance and the personal development of individual pupils, it would be possible for teachers and school officers to determine, with considerable accuracy, the career for which individuals are best fitted.

4. In order that this result may be attained, professional schools must equip teachers to search for, to recognize, and to interpret the evidences of special aptitude. This will necessitate a clear recognition of the influence of heredity upon mental and moral traits, and a more vital and practical view of genetic psychology than is yet widely prevalent.